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THEOSOPHY

Or
BUDDHISM
ABROAD.

REV. W. B. RILEY.

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THEOSOPHY, OR BUDDHISM ABROAD.

By REV. W. B. RILEY.

"To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to His Word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah viii. 20.

THEOSOPHY—WHENCE COMES IT?

THE first answer is, *From the somewhat foetid East.* Theosophical writers and teachers are not only willing, but appear even proud to point to India as the country where their "philosophy of life" has not only its origin, but has today its ablest exponents..

Some of them trace it to Egypt and name Amon, a priest consecrated to the God of Wisdom as its author; but

a larger number are proud to recognize Buddha as the one who most clearly comprehended and set it forth, and for that reason I have named our subject, "Theosophy, or Buddhism Abroad."

The author of "Guide to Theosophy" Tukoram Tatya says, "On the flanks of the Himalayas, in the Lamaseries of Thibet, among the Temples of Brahm, in the jungles of Hindoostan, is to be sought and found a science which surpasses the proudest examples Europe can exhibit." (page 170).

Believers in theosophy seem to feel no fear from thus boldly avowing the pagan origin of their faith.

ITS AUTHORS.

As to its Authors, they lay claim to almost every great name of the early ages, a pretence which I think many of those philosophers would repudiate, if yet alive; but, seeing that they are dead, theosophists cannot be hindered from saying that Zoroaster, Buddha,

Orpheus Pythagoras, Confucius, and even Socrates, and Ammonius Saccus as teachers of their faith. Such a claim, of course, sets up the consequential one that theosophists existed before the Christian era. The author of "Five years of Theosophy." a volume of 600 pages, selected from *The Theosophist*, says, "Laertius traces Theosophy to an epoch antedating the dynasty of Ptolemies, notwithstanding the fact that the Christian writers describe the development of the eclectic theosophical system to the early part of the third century of this era. But if it is the best, it is an ancient philosophy, and it would scarce seem impertinent to ask, why it had not accomplished more for human nature than it has? Koot Hoomi says that "its powerlessness is due to the prejudice and selfishness of the age in which we live, an age so sceptical that it would not accept the most astounding phenomena, in case the brotherhood consented to produce them."

I trust that explanation may be sufficient to Theosophists, but I confess that to a Christian, it seems exceedingly shallow, and almost shameful.

Have the prejudices and selfishness of the age paralyzed the power of Christianity so that it could make no progress? Have hoary systems stood across its path for centuries, refusing it a further step? Do Theosophists mean to admit that where Christianity has not only hewn its way, but removed mountains, crossed all rivers and seas, overturned all prejudice, and effected the most widespread reforms, theosophy has not been able to walk, even in its wake? Then we answer, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

In the famous World's Parliament of Religions. a Buddhist priest from Calcutta, Dharmapala, sharply asked his audience, "How many of you have read the life of Buddha?" And when only five hands were raised, he exclaimed in superb disgust, "475 millions accept our religion of hope and love. You call

yourself a nation, a great nation, and yet you do not know the history of this great teacher? How dare you judge?" In that thoroughly liberal, and somewhat thoughtless assembly, this shrewd strategem was cheered to the echo, but, as one of our religious papers afterward remarked, "It is easy to see the error into which that audience allowed itself to be betrayed." Christians do not doubt that Buddha was a great and good man, but certainly they do not need to read his life in order to form correct opinion of the religion which he founded. Christ said to His disciples, "Ye are my epistles, known and read of all men."

Does not that apply to Buddha? Is not this a universal law of all religions, "By their fruits ye shall know them?" And what are the fruits of this ancient faith? Nations and men down-trodden in body, mind and spirit; women degraded; children debased; no asylums for the insane and blind; no hospitals for the sick; no sympathy for the

starving; no assistance for the plague-stricken; criminals left at large; license enthroned; superstition rampant; cruelty, vice and uncleanness everywhere prevalent; no words can picture the horrors and the miseries that abound where Buddha reigns.

"How dare ye judge?" On the perfectly Christian basis, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

THEOSOPHY—WHAT IS IT?

The term is an interesting one. It is derived from two Greek words, which mean respectively "God" and "wisdom," and in their combination, "God-wisdom," or "wisdom concerning God." That is a high-sounding expression, and it is perfectly wonderful how many people in this world are enamored by big words; and you may have noticed that in proportion to one's want of education, in the absence of real knowledge, big words are oftenest employed.

Have I told you the story of that father whose son asked how thunder

soured milk, and the sire replied, "It is not the thunder that sours the milk. It is the lightning." "Well," said the boy, "how does lightning sour milk?" "Well, it is the electricity in the air that effects a combination between the constituents of the fluid, producing an acid." "Well, I suppose so, but how?" "Oh, go away, I don't know," said the father. "Well, I thought you didn't, or you wouldn't have used such big words."

The author before referred to, Monsieur (?) Koot Hoomi, says that, "the acquisition of this knowledge of theosophy is scarcely to be hoped for by any European; that while the brotherhood does not close its doors against sincere and resolute aspirants, occult science, in its highest branches, demands a self-devotion, an abandonment of earthly ambitions and resolutions, an absorption, and a perseverance in the probationary discipline, which is hardly to be hoped for from men of Western origin."

Too bad, for those Americans who are infatuated with the term "theosophy!" After having worked my way through three or four volumes of fog-bank, I am much disposed to agree with Brother Koot Hoomi, and give it up as beyond my knowledge.

The initiated have a further explanation of Theosophy. Of these books recently read upon this subject, I find every one of the authors excoriating Webster's definition, wherein the learned man says, "Theosophy is a supposed intercourse with God and superior spirits and consequent attainment of superhuman knowledge by physical processes; as by the theurgic operations of some ancient platonists, or by the chemical processes of the German fire-philosophers," and each of these authors replies, "That is a flippant explanation;" and each defines theosophy as "a theory of God, or the works of God, which have not revelation, but an inspiration of His own for its basis."

By "inspiration of His own," they

mean that manifestation of God which is discovered when the principle which they suppose to be the only higher power has worked itself into a conscious man.

It is easy to understand from this sentence that theosophy has nothing to do with the Bible, God's revelation to man, but depends instead upon what they call the "faculty of intuition." This faculty, they think, exists in very few people, and in that I am disposed to agree with them.

Dr. Pember says, "Even the writers of 'The Perfect Way" do not claim to have this faculty, and disclaim the authorship of their own books. The only adepts they mention are the members of an invisible Asiatic brotherhood; and yet as regards evidence all theosophists must believe these adepts; so that the faith required of them is as absolute as that of a Christian. But it is faith in those who come in their own name, and project their influence out of mystery and darkness, in place of

faith in Him who came in His Father's name, who openly went about doing good, and healing the people, and of whose deeds and sufferings His apostle was not afraid to say boldly, in the presence of both Roman and Jewish rulers, of the time and place, this thing was not done in a corner."

But the definition of the term ought also to cover *something of their purpose.*

Americans are generally familiar with the visit that Madam Blavatsky made to our country, and the organization, in 1875, in the city of New York, of a "Theosophical Society," the objects of which society were set forth as follows:

1st,—To form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood.

2nd,—To study Aryan literature, religion and science.

3rd,—To vindicate the importance of this inquiry.

4th,—To explore the hidden mysteries of nature, and the latent powers of men.

In "Isis Unveiled," 1st volume, pages 41 and 42 we learn that later this society "determined to spread among the poor benighted heathen such evidence as to the practical results of Christianity as would at least give both sides of the story to the communities where our missionaries are at work; that is, to furnish authenticated reports of ecclesiastical crimes and misdemeanors, schisms and heresies, controversies and litigations, doctrinal controversies and Biblical criticisms and revisions * * * * as the sequence of Christian teaching and example—the latter especially. The people of Palestine, India, Ceylon, Cashmania, Tartary, Thibet, China, and Japan, in all of our countries, where it has correspondents. It may also, in time, have much to say about the conduct of the missionaries toward those who contribute to their support." Here, then, as some one has said, is an open declaration of war against the whole Christian system. It ought to be understood by those Amer-

icans, who are accepting this larger term, just what its attitude toward the faith of our fathers and the teaching of God's Word is, that they be not deceived. The whole question of theosophy is one of choice between Buddha and the religion of India, or Christianity and the religion of England and America. All efforts to deny that fact are dishonest and unworthy moral teachers and professed students.

THE GREATER THEORIES OF THEOSOPHY.

One cannot properly understand any religion until he knows three things.

First—its theory of God; second—its theory of man; and third—its theory of the salvation of the soul.

Concerning God, theosophy has a definite faith—pantheism, pure and simple. Its teachers do not deny or seek to hide away that fact. They boldly affirm, "to be a theosophist, one need only worship the spirit of living nature, and try to identify himself with it." (Guide to Theosophy, page 17. See also pages 17 to 19 of "The Perfect Way").

This whole theory the Veda, the Bible of the Hindoo, has expressed in one of its hymns,

"The wise man views that mysterious being
In whom the universe perpetually exists,
Resting upon that sole support
In Him is the world absorbed,
From Him it issues.
In creatures He is twined and woved in various forms."

Of man, they also have a definite theory. They say the four elements which constitute him, counting from without inwards—the material body, the astral body, the soul and the spirit.

They hold that he has been evolved from the lower forms of life and defend their position by an appeal to Scripture, and here are some of the passages, "Think you not that God cannot of these stones raise up children unto Abraham?" And again, "I'll tell you that if ye shall hold your peace, the stones will cry out."

Their theory is that every stone con-

tains the divine monad which can work its way up to man. It is easy, therefore, to reason from that that they believe in the transmigration of the soul. You go from a stone to a plant; from a plant to an animal; from lower animal life to higher animal life; from higher animal life to lowest human life, and then rise by slow process through human life until you get to be a great man, and possibly at last become worthy to belong to the "Brotherhood."

They claim for Gautama Buddha that he had not only passed through hundreds of human lives, but had recovered the memories of 550 of his own incarnations; and the Hindu scriptures affirm "he who in his life time, has recovered the memory of all, that his soul has learned is already a God."

You can easily imagine the result of that philosphy. Men are constantly imagining that they are some superior ones, and are trying to recall the state of their former existence; and Dr.

Hartman, the leader of the German theosophists now lays claim to possessing the soul of William Shakespeare, to which some one has smartly replied, "It must be a mighty tight squeeze for William."

Their theory of salvation is the Hindoo one. You are to go on progressing by transmigration until you reach the highest state possible to man, and then step off into Nirvana, which is lapsing afresh into unconsciousness; being a part of that God who is only the *principle* that operates in the material and spiritual world.

"According to the statement of the Hindoo adepts," says Dr. Pember, "an ordinary being must pass through some 800 incarnations before he can complete his purification from sin and obtain the rest of Nirvana; and it is declared that the time essential to this circuit, taking in the intervening periods, in which one descends instead of rising, might occupy some seventy millions of years.

CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY.

Do you want to worship a principle, or a God? So far as I am concerned, when I cease to worship a person, I cease to worship at all. I shall never make a prayer to principle, that is itself not conscious of its own work, and is in consequence deaf to my most pitiful appeals. If there be a person in the circle of the heavens who is just and yet merciful; who is full of wisdom and power and yet of all tenderness and love, I can supplicate Him and expect, that like an earthly father, he will pity me; that like an earthly mother, He will love me; like a great judge, He will acquit me, and like an eternal friend, He will put His arms about me and save me. What the world needs today is not that conception of God that destroys His personality, but that belief in Him which brings Him nigh and discovers His love and His mercy.

I am willing to admit that there is a mystery about God. Edward Irving

compares the man who, with his infinite knowledge expects to understand all the deep things of God, to the little blind mole running his tunnel under ground and undertaking to interpret the marchings and countermarchings of armies overhead.

A. T Pierson says, "There are deep things about God, but none of them touch duty. The mysteries that surround Him do not prevent us from walking in the pathways of obedience. The Blessed Book, the Bible, acknowledges clouds and darkness to be around about God, but it never admits that clouds and darkness are around about the way that leads to Him.

You gaze up at Mt. Blanc. It is dim in the distance and clouds wrap its summit as with a white shroud, but the clouds belong about lofty peaks. That is their natural home and they make the mountain look grand and sublime. But, though these clouds envelop these summits hundreds of

feet above your pathway, at the mountain's foot it is plain and clear."

"The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth His handiwork." But the Word of God is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," and in that word I find God to be my Father, full of affection, loving me with an infinite love, giving His Son to die that I might be saved and sending His Spirit to guide me into all truth.

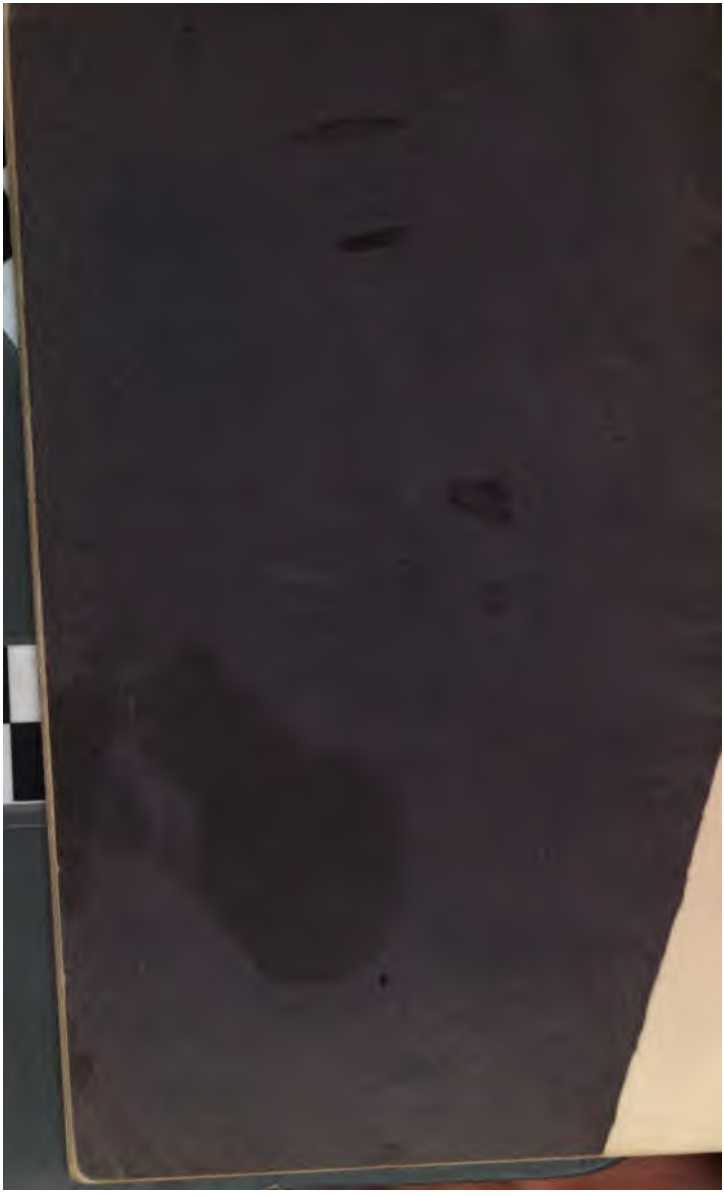
Give Him up for a principle, a monad working in the dark, an unconscious law operating according to a custom which it has not itself determined? With Joseph Parker I say, "that when I surrender my God, I surworth the living, destroying the foundations of hope and turning my soul into the eternal dark."

TO ACCEPT REVELATION OR INTUITION?

Here I find no difficulty. The revelation of this Book has been light to every land into which the volume has

come. "The intuition" which may be possessed by that unknown Asiatic brotherhood has to this hour effected nothing for the human kind. As between the Bible and the Veda, I prefer that which has proven itself a "Lamp to men's feet and a light to their paths." Jesus Christ accepted the Old Testament and by His wisdom added the New. The light that fell on His path cannot fail those of us who are willing to walk in the same, and with reference to every philosophy that man may set forth, is it not sufficient to say, "to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them."

And as between Heaven and Nirvana, do you find difficulty? For me a conscious state of eternal happiness is preferable to an unconscious, but eternal rest; and as between working out my salvation by the ups and downs of seventy millions of years to reach, as a climax of all that unimaginable

effort, a state of unconsciousness, or to step in a single moment into a salvation that is offered in Jesus Christ, I find no difficulty to choose.

Theosophy says, "Be good, do your best, and in seventy millions of years you may lose consciousness." Jesus Christ says, "Believe on Me, and today thou shalt be saved." No matter about the past. No matter about the future. The past will be forgiven. The future will be cared for by the power of God. The sins that have beset you until now shall be swept out of your lives; the sorrows that have come in consequence shall be taken away and you shall be saved. If you have sins, confess them and in addition to forgiveness, you shall be cleansed. If you have looked away from God, face about and the Father will run to meet you; not only receive you, but clothe you with the garments of His own righteousness and feast you at the table of His own love, and cause you to come in and go out in the peace that